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SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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[1](#). Mideast

[2](#). Iraq

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media highlighted PM Sharon's visit to the U.S. Sharon left Israel last night. He is expected to meet with National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice today and with President Bush Wednesday. Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Israeli source as saying that, even in light of Bush's current problems in Iraq, Sharon is expected a firm and solid U.S. statement backing his plan. Ha'aretz quoted sources in Jerusalem as saying that a disagreement remained regarding "one or two words," and not on principles. Sunday, Maariv reported that the defense establishment is considering dismantling settler outposts during Sharon's visit.

Leading media quoted Bush as saying Monday in Crawford, Texas during his meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak that the U.S. would continue to push for implementation of the road map even if Israel goes ahead with its planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Sunday, Yediot wrote that Bush would tell Sharon that the U.S. supports his unilateral disengagement plan and that it views it as a first step towards the implementation of the road map. Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon said this morning on Israel Radio that the plan is not part of the road map, which Israel supports but for which there is presently no partner. Yediot quoted senior sources "associated with the understandings shaping up in the U.S." as saying that Bush will declare that the U.S. understands that, in the context of a final-status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel will not return to the 1949 borders. (Sunday, Ha'aretz gave no sources for a similar report.) Leading media quoted Sharon as stressing last night in the West Bank town of Ma'aleh Adumim the importance to Israel of "strong" blocs of settlements, including Hebron and Kiryat Arba.

All media reported that the Likud's Central Elections Committee has decided that the referendum on Sharon's plan will take place on April 29.

Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported that the PA has expressed its opposition to any assurances that the U.S. might give Sharon in exchange for his unilateral withdrawal plan.

All media (banners in Yediot and Maariv) reported that the Shin Bet and the other security forces foiled 10 terrorist attacks planned for Passover, including a Fatah-Tanzim suicide bombing involving AIDS-infected blood. Yediot quoted defense sources as saying that Hizbullah is responsible for 80 to 90 percent of terrorist attacks. Jerusalem Post cited Hamas's denial on Monday that it has agreed to a cessation of attacks on Israel after the planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. All media reported that Monday before dawn IDF soldiers killed two gunmen and wounded a third when Palestinians tried to attack the Netzarim settlement in the Gaza Strip. According to the IDF, eight terrorists were involved in the attempted infiltration, the responsibility of which was jointly claimed by Fatah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Hatzofe led with an "exclusive" report that Saturday night Sharon and Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres agreed on the formation of a "left-wing" government, in

which Labor would get the foreign affairs and defense portfolios.

#### Iraq:

-Saturday, on Channel 2-TV, IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon said that he would not be surprised if chemical weapons were found in Iraq (cited by Ha'aretz), and that Israel had told the U.S. before the Iraq War that the Americans had overstated Iraq's weapons capability (cited by Hatzofe). Sunday, Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported that over the weekend thousands of Palestinians took part in demonstrations in support of the armed uprising against the U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. Jerusalem Post quoted Iraqi National Security Adviser Dr. Muafak Rube'i as saying at a press conference that the U.S.-led coalition and the Iraqi Governing Council could ban Al Jazeera-TV and Al Arabiya-TV reported from Iraq for ratcheting up sectarian strife in Iraq.

-Yediot quoted Iraqi FM Hoshiyar Zebari and the commander of the U.S. forces in Iraq, Gen. John Abizaid, as saying Monday that Iran and Syria are behind the wave of kidnappings of foreign citizens in Iraq.

-Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that Israel has announced that it would no longer handle the case of Nabil Razouk, the Israeli Arab from East Jerusalem who was abducted in Iraq. The newspaper quoted a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry as saying Saturday: "The issue has been passed on to the USG and the company that hired him." The spokesman added that Israel would no longer respond on the issue, and that it is waiting to get information from the U.S. State Department. Sunday, Jerusalem Post cited an announcement by the Canadian government that the other "Israeli" abductee, Ahmed Yassin Tikati, is actually a Canadian citizen whose real name is Hissan Fadel.

Ha'aretz cited a report by the Jerusalem-based Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group (PHRMP), headed by Bassem Eid, which found that over 11 percent of Palestinians killed during the Intifada died at the hands of other Palestinians.

Sunday, Maariv featured the importance of the Jewish vote in the upcoming U.S. presidential elections. Jerusalem Post cited a newly-issued report by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), summed up by ADL director Abraham Foxman: "Anti-Semitism remains deeply engrained in Egyptian society and continues to be a destabilizing force in the Middle East."

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[1](#)1. Mideast:  
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#### Summary: -----

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Sharon has a problematic record of keeping political commitments.... Despite this, American support and the great effort invested in achieving it, strengthen the chance that his disengagement plan will indeed be approved and carried out."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea, who is part of Prime Minister Sharon's delegation to the U.S., wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The papers given last night for Bush to study included statements that were agreed on.... Sharon wanted more.... For this he needed the President's consent."

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of Ha'aretz: "[Sharon's] real challenge will be to maintain security and prevent a renewed outburst of terror, which the letter from Bush will not be able to thwart."

Senior columnist Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz: "If ... the Likud, the cabinet, and the Knesset all approve the initiative, Sharon's plan may be deemed, to paraphrase Churchill, the beginning of the end of the occupation."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Even hawks like Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert have concluded that the so-called demographic problem is too serious to neglect, and even doves like Ehud Barak and

Shlomo Ben-Ami have conceded that under their current leadership the Palestinians must be fought."

Block Quotes:

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I. "The Tenth Meeting"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (April 13): "The [U.S.] Administration has shown sympathy for the idea of evacuating the settlements and presented it as having 'historic potential,' but asked in return, that the disengagement appear part of the 'road map' and not prevent the resumption of negotiations in the future. To demonstrate this, the Americans insisted that Israel also evacuate settlements in the West Bank, and not stop at the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, which is in any case considered an irksome security, economic and moral burden. Sharon has a problematic record of keeping political commitments. Everyone remembers his promises to evacuate the outposts in the West Bank and to remove roadblocks in the territories, which were only partially and belatedly kept. Despite this, American support and the great effort invested in achieving it, strengthen the chance that his disengagement plan will indeed be approved and carried out.... The American declarations on the permanent settlement are expected to support Israel's position that rules out withdrawal to the Green Line in the West Bank and rejects the Palestinian demand for the return of refugees to Israel. The Americans wished to phrase them ambiguously, in a way compatible with their past statements -- not to tie their hands in the future, and not to complicate their relations with the Arab states and Europe. This is therefore a symbolic achievement, which Sharon needs mainly due to the pressure of Binyamin Netanyahu and other Likud ministers. They have conditioned their support for the plan on the annexation of settlement blocs and negating 'the right of return.'"

II. "Sharon Wanted More"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea, who is part of Prime Minister Sharon's delegation to the U.S., wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 13): "The papers given last night for Bush to study included statements that were agreed on and statements in parentheses. The parts in parentheses have not been agreed on. The Americans agreed, for example, that the final status arrangement between Israel and the Palestinians will take into consideration the demographic situation created in the territories, a sort of intimation of recognition of some of the settlements. Sharon wanted more. He wanted it stated that the final status arrangement would take into consideration the large population centers of Jews, a hint to the settlement blocs. He wanted it to be stated that the 1967 borders are not realistic. For this he needed the President's consent. When [Sharon bureau head] Dov Weisglass left for Washington, he had in his bag 12 sections in parentheses. One problem that was apparently resolved was Israel's fear of new diplomatic plans. Bush will officially promise Sharon that the U.S. will not support any plan that deviates from the road map. Another issue that is close to being resolved regards the right of return. Bush will state that the designated haven for refugees is the Palestinian state. This formulation is still far from what Netanyahu demanded, but it may satisfy [moderate Likud cabinet minister] Tzippi Livni."

III. "A Summit of the Weak"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of Ha'aretz (April 13): "Since Sharon and Bush's last meetings, last summer, the two have sunk to a political nadir. Bush is no longer the big winner of the 'mission accomplished' in the Iraq war; he is no longer the maker of new order in the region. His army is stuck in the Iraqi quagmire, and he is falling behind in the polls for the November elections. He will have to work hard to beat his Democrat rival John Kerry and win a second term in office. Sharon is haunted by the shadow of police investigations and the looming decision of the attorney general whether to indict him. His chances in the polls are plummeting too, and his public credibility is at a low. Thus, Bush and Sharon will meet tomorrow in a summit of the weak, intended to help them a little and to demonstrate an achievement.... The main threat to Sharon's plan comes not from the Americans, even if their president is changed, and not even from the Likud. The danger is that the Palestinians will try to repeat their achievement in Gaza and drive Israel by force out of the West Bank as well. Perhaps to thwart this, Sharon

resumed his threats on Arafat. But his real challenge will be to maintain security and prevent a renewed outburst of terror, which the letter from Bush will not be able to thwart."

#### IV. "The Beginning of the End of the Occupation"

Senior columnist Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz (April 13): "Bush and Blair, two leaders in trouble, need some kind of success with regard to our conflict so as not to lose the Arab world. Sharon will return from Washington with a green light for his plan. It might not be exactly what he wanted, but it will give him enough of a tail wind to continue to pursue this, the most intensive and consistent leadership chapter in his life. From the time he went public with his initiative, and until the Likud membership referendum, 12 weeks will have passed. If Mofaz is right, and the Likud, the cabinet, and the Knesset all approve the initiative, Sharon's plan may be deemed, to paraphrase Churchill, the beginning of the end of the occupation."

#### IV. "Respect the New Consensus"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (April 11): "On the face of it, what is at stake here is the fate of several dozen settlements and their several thousand inhabitants. In fact, the stakes are much higher.... Even hawks like Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert have concluded that the so-called demographic problem is too serious to neglect, and even doves like Ehud Barak and Shlomo Ben-Ami have conceded that under their current leadership the Palestinians must be fought. Between them, all these newly humbled leaders have all the makings of a new Israeli consensus: one that appreciates the attachment to any part of our ancestral land, but also realizes we are not alone here; one that understands that, while peace is worth concessions, it can only be struck with enemies who have truly abandoned the quest for destruction; and one that realizes that, in the foreseeable future, surviving here will still mean fighting some Arabs and demand solidarity among Jews. Those who intend to brace for the referendum with violence, whether physical or verbal, would do well to understand that the Israeli public is no longer the impressionable one it was in previous years. Today's Israelis crave and deserve the national solidarity of which the Right and Left once jointly deprived them."

#### I2. Iraq:

##### Summary:

Ha'aretz editorialized: "The President of the U.S. can present to his guests [Mubarak and Sharon] one important lesson.... Occupation is not the end of a war.... It would appear that this lesson, which has been drawn after one year of warfare in Iraq, has yet to permeate the minds of Israel's decision makers, after 37 years of occupation."

##### Block Quotes:

"Between Iraq and Palestine"

Ha'aretz editorialized (April 11): "Events of the past week in Iraq are likely to create the erroneous impression that the rule of coalition forces in the country has totally collapsed.... Events are, indeed, dangerous and circumstances could have grave repercussions if they are not handled wisely and quickly. Nonetheless, it is still too early to talk in apocalyptic terms about a collapse of authority in Iraq.... In various parts of the world, including areas close to Israel, voices are articulating anew glee about the U.S. entanglement in Iraq.... As in the past, such militant voices drown out rational voices in the Arab world that speak not only for the genuine welfare of Iraq, but also for the aim of carrying out civil reform in their own countries. It would appear that of all peoples in the region, the Palestinians are the last ones who should celebrate America's misfortunes.... For his part, the President of the U.S. can present to his guests [Mubarak and Sharon] one important lesson drawn from his war in the Middle East: Occupation is not the end of a war, but rather another phase -- it is perhaps the toughest stage, since it

involves war against civilians. Hence a local, national leadership is needed to continue the job. It would appear that this lesson, which has been drawn after one year of warfare in Iraq, has yet to permeate the minds of Israel's decision makers, after 37 years of occupation."

LEBARON